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ABSTRACT

THE STUDY TESTED HYPOTHESES PREDICTING SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE SELF-PERCEPTION SCORES OF: (1) DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN IN AN URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND DISADVANTAGED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS; (2) DISADVANTAGED GIRLS AND BOYS; AND, (3), WITHIN EACH SEX, DISADVANTAGED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS. ALL THE STUDENTS IN GRADES FOUR, FIVE, AND SIX OF AN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SITUATED IN A DISADVANTAGED URBAN AREA WERE INCLUDED--A TOTAL OF 122 (70 BOYS AND 52 GIRLS). A SAMPLE OF 100 DISADVANTAGED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, 60 BOYS AND 40 GIRLS, WAS RANDOMLY SELECTED FROM ONE OF THE CITY'S THREE HIGH SCHOOLS. TO OBTAIN THEIR SELF PERCEPTION SCORES, 40 BI-POLAR TRAITS, EXPRESSED IN SENTENCE FORM, WERE GIVEN TO ALL OF THE 222 SUBJECTS. AN INDEX SCORE WAS OBTAINED FOR THEIR SELF CONCEPT. AN ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE REVEALED A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE SCORES OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN AND THE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS--WHETHER WITH THE SCHOOL TAKEN AS A WHOLE, IN INTERACTION OF SCHOOL AND SEX, OR IN THE INTERACTION OF SCHOOL, SEX, AND GRADE. THE INTERPRETATION OF THESE RESULTS CENTERS UPON EXPECTATION LEVEL AND SOCIAL REINFORCEMENT THEORY. NOT AVAILABLE IN HARD COPY DUE TO MARGINAL LEGIBILITY OF ORIGINAL DOCUMENT. (JM)

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Abstract

A Comparative Study of the Self-Perceptions of Disadvantaged Children in Elementary and Secondary Schools

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In the comparison of the self-perception scores of disadvantaged children in elementary and secondary schools, it was found that, while both levels of students indicated positive self concepts, high school students' scores were significantly lower. The interpretation of results centered upon expectation level and reinforcement theory.

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A Comparative Study of the Self-Perceptions of Disadvantaged Children in Elementary and Secondary Schools

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Statement of the Problem

The negative self concepts of disadvantaged children is well documented (Coleman, 1966; Havighurst & Moorefield, 1967; Tannenbaum, 1967); their positive self concepts is much less so (Soares & Soares, 1969). A possible explanation of the self-esteem of disadvantaged children is in terms of reinforcement theory and expectation level. It is suggested that disadvantaged children, whose interpersonal relationships are only with disadvantaged individuals and who attend neighborhood elementary schools, are reinforced by their family, by their friends, and by their teachers, who in turn expect less of them in comparison to what they would expect the middle class child to attain. Therefore, even though disadvantaged children may have a lower level of expectation set for them, they very often do achieve, and this process of success reinforces their self-images as achieving individuals. However, once these children enter into a more socially and economically heterogeneous learning situation--such as the high school--would their self-esteem begin to dwindle? Would they begin to think less well of themselves? And--with the greater competition at the high school and the raising of the expectation level for them, could disadvantaged children maintain their positive self-perceptions? These were the questions pertinent to the present study, which compared the self-images of urban disadvantaged children in an elementary school setting and a secondary school setting.

Specifically, the study was concerned with testing the following hypotheses:

(1) There is a significant difference between the self-perception scores of disadvantaged children in an urban neighborhood elementary school setting

and the self-perception scores of disadvantaged high school students.

(2) There is a significant difference between the self-perception scores of disadvantaged girls and boys.

(3) There is a significant difference in the self-perception scores of disadvantaged elementary school boys and disadvantaged high school boys.

(4) There is a significant difference between the self-perception scores of disadvantaged elementary school girls and disadvantaged high school girls.

METHOD

Subjects

There was a total of 222 disadvantaged subjects in this study: 122 elementary school children, with 70 of them boys and 52 girls; and 100 high school students, with 60 of these boys and 40 girls. All the subjects in grades 4, 5, and 6 of an urban elementary school situated in a disadvantaged area of the city were included. A sample of 100 disadvantaged high school students was randomly selected from one of the city's three high schools. The criterion of "disadvantaged" was determined according to family annual income (less than $4,000), welfare aid status, membership in an ethnic minority group, and housing in low-rent or subsidized tenements.

Procedure

To obtain their self-perception scores, forty bi-polar traits, expressed in sentence form, were given to the 222 subjects. This instrument was the same as that previously cited (Soares & Soares, 1969). An index score was obtained for their Self Concept, which is the algebraic sum of the positive and negative traits so checked by the individual respondents.

Example:

I am a happy person.	_____	_____	_____	_____	I am not a happy person.
	very happy	more happy than unhappy	more unhappy than happy	very unhappy	

RESULTS

The index scores of the groups were treated statistically by an analysis of variance design (Table 1). Duncan's comparison method was used to determine the significantemeans. Table 2 indicates the descriptive data of the groups and the extent of significance of the various means.

Table 1

Analysis of Variance Results

for Self Concept Scores

Source of Variation	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio
School	1	962.93	962.93	4.84*
Sex	1	411.14	411.14	n.s.
Grade	2	924.64	462.32	n.s.
Sc x Se	1	790.01	790.01	3.98*
Sc x G	2	206.33	103.17	n.s.
Se x G	2	444.69	222.35	n.s.
Sc x Se x G	2	2,155.14	1,077.57	5.42**
Within	210	41,743.67	198.73	
Total	221	47,638.60		

*p<.05
**p<.01

The results clearly show in Table 1 a significant difference between the scores of the elementary school children and the high school students--whether with school taken as a whole, in interaction of school and sex, or in the interaction of school, sex, and grade. In the comparison of means, as indicated in Table 2, all mean differences between any combination of school and sex were found to be significant.

Table 2

Mean Self-Perception Scores, Standard Deviations, and Significant Differences for Disadvantaged Children

School	Sex: Males	Females	t
Elementary	n=70	n=52	
N=122	M=22.86	M=20.80	2.04*
M=9.15	SD= 8.16	SD=10.14	
High School	n=60	n=40	
N=100	M=18.76	M=16.72	2.73**
M=8.92	SD=10.61	SD= 7.23	
t=3.43**	2.48**	2.37*	

*p<.05
**p<.01

Upon examining Table 2 it can be readily seen that disadvantaged children--both boys and girls--in the elementary school indicated significanlty higher self-perception scores than disadvantaged students at the high school level.

Conclusions

Within a neighborhood elementary school environment, disadvantaged children may have positive self-images and, according to research already cited, significantly higher self concepts than advantaged elementary school children. However, when they enter the more socio-economically heterogeneous and more academically competitive high school setting, these children may become less sure of themselves, and perhaps their lower-self-perception scores reflect this change. The results of the present study seem to indicate that this lower self-esteem on the part of disadvantaged high school students might very well come about because of the new and more difficult challenges encountered in their new school environment.

compared to that of the elementary school years. The task is to aid disadvantaged elementary school students to raise their level of aspiration and to be better prepared to meet the challenges of the high school so that, when they are secondary school level students, their self-perceptions would not necessarily be lowered.

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